Approached by Berrigan, Douglas Says

By Betty Medsger
Washington Post Staff Writer

HARRISBURG, Pa., Feb. 28 — FBI informant Boyd F. Douglas testified today that imprisoned priest Philip Berrigan asked him to smuggle letters for him the first day they met at Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in late April, 1970.

And in May, 1970, Douglas said, Berrigan told him of plans for antiwar actions and reported he had inspected heating ducts beneath federal buildings in Washington.

Douglas said he agreed at once to carry the letters.

The defense has sought to depict Douglas as "an agent provocateur," alleging it was he, not Berrigan, who suggested smuggling letters.

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Douglas said he read the contents of the letters beginning with the first one preparing for the day when prison officials would catch him.

Numerous letters allegedly exchanged between Berrigan and Sister Elizabeth McAlister, a New York nun who also is a defendant, are the core of the government's case against the seven defendants, who are charged with conspiracy to kidnap presidential adviser Henry Kissinger, to bomb tunnels under federal buildings in Washington and to raid federal offices.

Douglas said he kept copies of the letters and remembered his conversations with Berrigan.

The 31-year-old Douglas said he also was motivated to inform by virtue of the fact that "everyone I had met at that time was in a clerical field. I'm a Catholic and had been brought up a very strict Catholic." Six of the seven defendants are present or former priests and nuns.

When Berrigan arrived at Lewisburg, Douglas was on a study-release program at Bucknell University, where he said he met Prof. Richard Drinnon, the chairman of the history department. At the request of Drinnon, he said, he met Berrigan when he arrived at the prison and asked if "there was anything I could do for him."

At that point, standing there in the prison yard, said Douglas, Berrigan asked him, "Is there any way you could get a message out or make a phone call to a friend for me?"

Beginning the next day, said Douglas, he took Berrigan letters to Sister Elizabeth McAlister out of the prison and gave them to Drinnon. But later, he said, Berrigan said he wanted to create a system with "mail drops" in Lewisburg and New York because he did not trust Drinnon.

Though he said he had read and copied the letters allegedly given him by Berrigan, Douglas said, "I started to become quite sympathetic to Philip Berrigan's whole philosophy of destruction of draft boards."

His sympathy, he said, was prompted by his feeling that the government had cheated him of parole and because of the scars left by medical experiments performed on him at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., while a prisoner in 1964. He had sued the government and received a $15,000 settlement.

He indicated that his sympathetic response to Berrigan elicited from the priest a description of the alleged conspiracy to bomb tunnels under federal buildings.

Two women who have said that Douglas proposed to them in the summer and fall of 1970, Mary Elizabeth Sandel and Jane Hoover, testified that Douglas during that time urged them to participate in illegal antiwar actions.

The two young women, both 1971 graduates of Bucknell University, testified that they had copied letters for Douglas, the letters allegedly written by Father Berrigan and Sister McAlister. Miss Sandal said this morning that the letter shown her by the government today and described as the original of the only letter she transcribed into the informer's notebook did not appear to be in the same handwriting, was on a different kind of paper and had a paragraph missing.